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EN30SC

Ms. Smith

June 6, 2019

Give brief synopsis of novel

Karl's Influential Relationships in *The Berlin Boxing Club*

Without support from others, being a teenager is not easy. In Robert Sharenow's novel, *The Berlin Boxing Club*, Karl struggled through his teen years during the reign of Adolf Hitler, but ultimately succeeded with guidance from adults. Karl's relationships with his father, Neblig and Max Schmelling greatly affected his personal well-being and growth.

Karl's father was initially oblivious to who his son was, but as the novel progressed, he could not help but realize Karl's strengths. At the beginning of the novel, it was revealed that Karl's father wanted Karl to be an artist just like himself, but little did he know, Karl was keen about cartooning and sports. When Karl's father was attempting to sell a work of art to Max Schmelling, he said, "I'm afraid my son was not blessed with the grace of an athlete, Max." (Sharenow 34). This criticism angered Karl because his father never actually watched him play any sport, nor did he take the time to play with him. As Karl became a better boxer, his father's ignorance and lack of interest persisted. Only when his art gallery was under attack by Nazi supporters did he realize how adept Karl had become at boxing. Karl fended off a couple of men while his dad was wounded and his father said, "I finally got to see you fight. You must be something in the ring." (Sharenow 347). Hearing the pride in his father's voice changed the relationship they shared. This gave Karl new confidence that he did not previously have. Unfortunately, Karl continued to be fearful about having his Jewish heritage exposed and his relationship with Neblig brought him comfort.

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Before meeting Neblig at the boxing club, Karl lived in constant fear of being outed as a Jew. He was terrified of losing his friendships and social position in his school. His worst nightmare came true when the Wolfpack, a gang of Nazi supporting children, attacked him and revealed his secret identity. The Wolfpack beat him so severely that his "limbs felt numb, as if [his] body had suddenly turned liquid. And then the fear so overwhelmed [him] that [he] totally lost control. A small stream of urine trickled down the side of [his] leg and onto [his] pants, which were bunched at [his] feet. [He] felt the warm wetness on [his] legs." (Sharenow 9). The trauma that Karl endured motivated him to work hard on his training at the boxing club. It is there where his friendship with Neblig grew. After a lengthy training regimen, Karl was in a boxing tournament where he faced one of his former attackers from the Wolfpack. When it became apparent that Karl could win the fight, he was, for the second time in his life, outed as a Jew and he got disqualified from the tournament. Even though Karl did not return to the boxing club after being exposed as a Jew, Neblig tracked him down and wrote him a letter of encouragement. Karl realized that "Neblig had not given up on [him] after all. [He] still had a real friend who had spent the time and energy to track [him] down." (Sharenow 312). Because of this letter, Karl understood that not all Germans were Nazi loving Jewish haters and that there was reason to hope that Adolf Hitler's reign would someday end. While Karl's relationship with Neblig brought him comfort and deeper understanding, his relationship with his boxing coach Max encouraged him to be strong in himself.

Without Max in his life, Karl would have never overcome his overwhelming insecurities. Initially, Max helped Karl develop his physical strength. He taught him about nutrition, sleep and the fundamentals of boxing which gave him the courage to face his enemies. More importantly, Max taught him life lessons that built his emotional strength. He provided Karl with advice like, "Name-calling is a part of fighting, the weakest punches are thrown with the tongue. You've got to thicken your muscles to throw harder punches." (Sharenow 123). Max's support enabled Karl to deal with his family's eviction

and uncertain future as well as his traumatic experiences. Because of Max's influence, Karl was able to face his nemesis from the Wolfpack in a boxing tournament with confidence instead of running away. When the Wolfpack boy said, "Now everyone will see how to beat a Jew, Piss Boy." (Sharenow 287), Karl responded with, "Or how to get beaten by a Jew." (Sharenow 287). Instead of crumbling with fear, Karl reacted with confidence and power. Without Max's influence, Karl would have been a nervous wreck, incapable of moving forward; instead, he gained the confidence he needed to leave his parents behind and start a new life in America. ✓

The concern and mentorship given to Karl from significant adults in his life helped him successfully navigate through his difficult teen years. His father, friend and coach each provided Karl with important tools required for survival. The recognition, encouragement and guidance he received allowed him to develop from a terrified teenager to a self-assured, optimistic young man ready to face an uncertain future far from home. Without significant input from caring adults, the passage from teen to adulthood can be overwhelming and insurmountable for anyone. ✓

Works Cited

Sharenow, Robert. *The Berlin Boxing Club*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.